

Larry Rivera

From: <Morrow321@aol.com>
To: <larry@merdist.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 16, 2014 1:29 PM
Subject: Some nuggets on LBJ

Scroll to the very bottom and see McGeorge Bundy compare Lyndon Johnson to Joseph Stalin.

Longtime LBJ aide George Reedy on what a Narcissist, Bully, Sadist & Lout Lyndon Johnson was *Reedy worked for LBJ from 1951-1965*

"He was notorious for abusing his staff, for driving people to the verge of exhaustion- and sometimes over the verge; for paying the lowest salaries for the longest hours of work on Capitol Hill; for publicly humiliating his most loyal aides; for keeping his office in a constant state of turmoil by playing games with reigning male and female favorites."

"There was no sense in which he could be described as a pleasant man. His manners were atrocious- not just slovenly but frequently calculated to give offense. Relaxation was something he did not understand and would not accord to others. He was a bully who would exercise merciless sarcasm on people who could not fight back but could only take it. Most important, he had no sense of loyalty- at least, not the kind of loyalty I learned on the Irish Near North Side of Chicago, where life was bearable only because people who had very little in the way of wordly goods had very much in the way of mutual trust. To Johnson, loyalty was a one-way street: all take on his part and all give on the part of everyone else- his family, his friends, his supporters."

[Reedy, p. x]

"He was cruel, even to people who had virtually walked the last mile for him. Occasionally he would demonstrate his gratitude for extraordinary services by a lavish gift- an expensive suit of clothes, an automobile, jewelry for the women on his staff. The gift was always followed by an outpouring of irreverent abuse (I believe he thought his impulse was an example of weakness for which he had to atone) and a few members of his entourage noted that gift was invariably tax deductible on his part.

Furthermore, some of the most lavish presents frequently went to members who had performed no services other than adulation. And when his personal desires were at stake, he had absolutely no consideration for the situation in which other people found themselves. They were required to drop everything to wait upon him and were expected to forget their private lives in his interests. He even begrudged one of his top assistants a telephone call to his wife on their wedding anniversary, which the assistant was spending on the LBJ ranch and his wife at their home in Washington, D.C." [Reedy, xiv]

"He had a habit of adopting all useful thoughts as his own, and often the originator of highly important ideas would forget his or her own authorship in a matter of hours and be ready to swear that the whole thing originated in the brain of "the Leader." [Reedy, xvi]

"He had a remarkable capacity to convince himself that he held the principles he should hold at any given time, and there was something charming about the air of injured innocence with which he would treat anyone who brought forth evidence that he had held other views in the past. It was not an act. His whole life was lived in the present and he was tenacious in his conviction that history always conformed to current necessities." [Reedy, p. 2]

"To complicate the picture, his *own* view of what had happened frequently shifted. To the outside world, this appeared as a form of mendacity. It is my firm belief, from close association over a number of years, that the man never told a deliberate lie. But he had a fantastic capacity to persuade himself that the "truth" which was convenient for the present was *the truth* and anything that conflicted with it was the prevarication of enemies. He literally willed what was in his mind to be reality and, as he was a master at imposing his will upon the people, the society, and the world around him, he saw no reason for history to be exempt from the process."

[Reedy, p. 3]

"That other man had to be Robert Kennedy, whom he regarded as the focal point for all the forces who sought the downfall of Lyndon Johnson." [Reedy, 6]

"As a rule, his language colorful, pointed, and what can most charitably be described as "earthy." His "humor" was based chiefly on the contents of toilet bowls and he was addicted to "pie-in-the-face" practical jokes. His favorite spectator sport was watching bovine copulation and he gloried in summoning fastidious males to his bathroom, where conference and excretion could be intermingled. His consumption of beverage alcohol was for purposes other than sacramental and in quantities that did not accord St. Paul's "a little wine for thy stomach's sake." [Reedy, p.34-35]

"They had to be young, they had to be cheerful, they had to be malleable, and it helped if they were slightly antagonistic to

him at the outset. He dearly loved to convert an anti-Johnson liberal with a slightly plump figure and a dowdy wardrobe into a lean, impeccably clad female whose face was masked in cosmetics and who adored the ground he walked on (or, at least, told him she adored the ground he walked on). To her, he would pour out all his dreams and aspirations in what (as it was described to me later by one woman with a sense of humor) was an incredibly potent monologue. The motif was that he trusted her loyalty and needed her wisdom and she had to come with him to occupy the top spot in his organization. It was an offer rarely refused.

The reality was somewhat different. The best the woman could hope for was a position as his private secretary. She learned very quickly that it was not the post of a top "advisor." He had no respect for the political intelligence of any woman except his wife- and, unfortunately, he usually listened to her only when he had done something stupid and had to find a bail-out maneuver.

There were many compensations for the reigning favorite. She could look forward to travel under plush conditions, attendance at glamorous social functions with the Johnsons (he would always find a "safe" male for an escort), expensive clothes, and frequent trips to New York, where a glamorous make-up artist would initiate her into the mysteries of advanced facial make-up, resulting in cosmetics so lavishly applied that they became a mask."

[Reedy, p. 36]

"Very few reigning favorites were allowed to run the office for any great length of time. One of them, who held his attention longer than the rest and for whom he exhibited some really deep feelings, was married off, probably because a continued relationship was incompatible with the vice presidency.

The others dropped back into the pool known to the male staff members (speaking under their breaths) as "the harem." His greatest joy was traveling with a large number of women over whom he could fuss- buying their clothes, supervising their diets, and admonishing them at every public stop to "put on some fresh lipstick." It was quite a show. He may have been "just a country boy from the central hills of Texas" but he had many of the instincts of a Turkish sultan of Istanbul."

[Reedy, p. 37]

"The result of all of this was an office in a constant state of turmoil. A new reigning favorite meant a period of several weeks in which workable routines would be upset; morale would fall to all-time lows; efficiency would go out the window."

(Reedy, p. 37)

"He was rarely candid, and when he spoke of personal matters his words were such a mixture of fantasy, euphemism, and half-truth that it was impossible to separate out the nuggets of

revelation. In this case, however, the facts are compelling. As it became clearer that inexorable forces were pushing him into the small circle of men from whom the nation picks its chief executives, he developed a pattern of conduct that indicated beyond a doubt a desire to revert to childhood. He intermingled, almost daily, childish tantrums; threats of resignation (which I realize in retrospect were the equivalent of the small boy who says he will take his baseball and go home); wild drinking bouts; a remarkable nonpaternal yen for young girls; an almost frantic desire to be in the company of young people."

[Reedy, p. 56]

"A few weeks after his heart attack in 1955, he summed up the whole problem when he told a conference of doctors, gathered to evaluate his condition, that he enjoyed nothing but whiskey, sunshine, and sex. Without realizing what he was doing, he had outlined succinctly the tragedy of his life."

[Reedy, p. 56]

"The drinking bouts became increasingly heavy and increasingly frequent. When he was with staff members, there would usually be a point at which he would launch a tirade reviling an assistant for a long series of fancied wrongs and assumed inadequacies. ...

They were invariably preceded by a wild drinking bout. He was not an alcoholic or a heavy drinker in the commonly accepted sense of those words. But there were occasions when he would pour down Scotch and soda in a virtually mechanical motion in rhythm with the terrible tension building visibly within him and communicating itself to his listeners. The warning signs were unmistakable and those with past experience tried to get away before the inevitable flood of invective. As they found out, it was rarely possible.

[Reedy 56-57]

"As the 1960 campaign drew closer, the drinking bouts surpassed all previous records.... The 1960 campaign was a nightmare for the staff- a weird collage of beratings, occasional drunken prowls up and down hotel corridors, and frantic efforts to sober him up in the mornings so he could make the speaking engagements. Here again he came close to disaster. He spent a whole night in a hotel room in El Paso pouring invective upon the head of a bewildered advance man...On the stump he had very few peers. But in his rooms at night, the drinking patterns continued as did the threats of leaving the campaign." [Reedy, pp. 58-59]

"Someone had told him about the theories of subliminal conditioning then making the rounds and his methodology was to mutter "sincere" over and over in the presence of journalists. When he could insert the word into a sentence, he would do so even when it had to be dragged in by the heels, kicking and

screaming. When he could find no sentence that was suitable, he would repeat "sincere" under his breath, over and over to the absolute bewilderment of his audience. Fortunately, he dropped the effort before articles could appear questioning his sanity."

[Reedy, p. 68]

"This occurred when he was vice president and obsessed with the idea that Bobby Kennedy was directing an anti-LBJ campaign. His elevation to the presidency made absolutely no difference. Brush after brush took place with the journalists who, in the early days of his administration, accepted him as a miracle worker to be treated with downright reverence.

Eventually, however, his conviction that they were opposed to him created an opposition- always the outcome of paranoia. He did not attribute this to his own shortcomings but to the machinations of the man he regarded as his arch foe. At this stage of the game, Bobby was helpless to do him much mischief but LBJ still believed that there was a plot for which the press was the principal instrument." [Reedy, p. 70]

"In a very important sense, LBJ was a man who had been deprived of the normal joys of life. He knew how to struggle; he knew how to outfox political opponents; he knew how to make money; he knew how to swagger. But he did not know how to live. He had been programmed for business and for business only and outside of his programming he was lost." [Reedy, p. 81]

"I never fully understood this or other similar episodes. In the back of his mind, it is possible that he believed these visits were inspired by Bobby Kennedy as part of a "plot" to delete the name LBJ from the ticket in 1964. This had become an obsession with him- a conviction that peopled the world with agents of the president's brother all seeking to do him in. Someone- I never found out who- very actively fed this belief and kept him in a perpetual state of anxiety. This reached major proportions with the outbreak of the Billy Sol Estes and Bobby Baker scandals....

There was absolutely nothing to keep Johnson's name in the Billy Sol Estes story except the LBJ refusal to deal with the press. He covered up when there was nothing to cover and thereby created the suspicion that he was involved somehow. His reasoning was simple: The whole thing existed as a Bobby Kennedy plot and to talk about it to the press was to help Bobby Kennedy.

About the same thing happened in the Bobby Baker scandal except that in this instance he was really close to the central figure in the expose. He had considered Bobby as virtually a son and succeeded in promoting him to be secretary of the Senate Majority at an age when Bobby should have been in knee britches."

[Reedy 134-135]

"But Johnson refused to accept the obvious explanation. He

insisted that it stayed in the press because of conscious pressure from Bobby Kennedy, who, he claimed, was holding daily briefings with the sole purpose of knifing LBJ in the back. He was so convinced of the existence of these meetings that I made a personal effort to check on them myself. There was not the least bit of evidence that they were taking place or had taken place. I am not a master spy but it is hardly likely that during that period the attorney general of the United States could have engaged in such an organized effort without one of my newspaper friends tipping me off.

This viewpoint did not impress Johnson in the slightest. He merely said I was "naive" and that he would demonstrate the truth to me. The next time the two of us were together with a correspondent, he lectured the man on how wrong it was to ask stooge questions and then said: "I know all about those briefings downtown." It became apparent at once the correspondent did not know *not* know about them but that did not stop LBJ. He continued his lectures to other correspondents- a practice that led to some speculation as to his mental stability. Fortunately, the speculation did not appear in print.

These episodes were merely ludicrous. Much more serious was his interpretation of *all* his relations with the administration as involved with "plots." He resisted- to the point of hysteria- the round-the-world trip which later became famous for his discovery of Bashir, the camel driver, in Karachi.... He raved, at least to me, that Bobby Kennedy was trying to set him up.

[Reedy, pp. 136-137]

"Those of us who had to deal with what few substantive matters characterized the vice presidency found it increasingly difficult to secure decisions from him. The consumption of booze increased as did the number of hours he would spend in bed at home just staring at the ceiling and growling at anyone who came into the room... There was some demon within the man himself that would have operated in any position short of the presidency."

[Reedy, pp. 139-140]

"Why Jack Kennedy offered Lyndon Johnson the vice presidency and why Lyndon Johnson accepted it, I will never know. Frankly, I doubt whether *anyone* will ever know now that the principal protagonists are dead. My guess is that it represented a shrewd political judgement on Kennedy's part."

[Reedy, p. 141]

"Behind the scenes, however, the campaign was grinding agony for a staff which felt a duty to the campaign to keep the seamy side from showing. There were some terrible moments- drunken, aimless wanderings through a hotel corridor in Chicago (fortunately blocked off by police) in which he tried to crawl into the bed of the female correspondent (I got the

impression as we led him away that he was seeking comfort, not sex); a wild drinking bout in El Paso in which he spent the night cursing and raving at a good friend; continuous torrents of abuse directed at his staff. It was amazing to watch him go out in public and make truly compelling speeches off-the-cuff after such episodes."

[Reedy, p. 142]

"Whatever the reality, however, the LBJ paranoia continued to mount. He was convinced that Bobby Kennedy had virtual control over the nation's press and that this control was being used to pave the way for a "dump LBJ" campaign in 1964. This was a period in which he proceeded to "hang around" the outer offices of the White House- something like a precinct captain sitting in the anteroom of a ward leader hoping to be recognized. It was not a very propossessing sight and certainly not worthy of a man of his stature."

[Reedy, p. 147]

"He was not a man of thought and, instead, it became for him the period of intense misery. He obviously had not found what he had expected to find in the vice presidency, and while his intellect was keen, it was not of the variety that could grant him inner serenity. What could have been to a philosopher an era of growth was, in his eyes, a time of shame and failure.

[Reedy, p. 147]

"Johnson campaigned as though there were a real contest with the outcome in doubt. In time I came to understand that the *act* of campaigning had importance to him that was totally unrelated to the goals. There was some form of vitalizing force in frenzied crowds that drove him into a state of ecstasy...

"What was even more interesting was the scene that invariably followed a session with a crowd. Despite his tapping technique, some people would always be able to grasp his palm for a fleeting moment. In such instances, it would be necessary for him to tear loose- leaving long scratches on the back of his hand. He loved those scratches. A medical attendant aboard Air Force One was ready with some soothing ointment for a gentle massage. LBJ would insist that everyone on the plane cluster around during the massage period and he would point lovingly to each scratch, describing in detail the person responsible for it. The first time I witnessed the performance, it seemed to me that he was thinking in terms of the Stigmata from the Cross. But the performance was much too sensual for such an interpretation. There was something post-orgasmic about the scene. A psychiatrist could have had a field day."

[Reedy, p. 152]

"The trouble was that Johnson himself became a victim of the Gulf of Tonkin resolution. It froze him into a totally uncompromising position where he had no alternatives- or thought he had no alternative- to feeding more and more draftees into the meat grinder. He had never, in his entire life,

learned to confess error, and this quality- merely amusing or exasperating in a private person- resulted in cosmic tragedy for a president. He had to prove that he had been right all along. And this meant that he had to do more of what he had been doing despite the demonstrable failure of his Vietnam policies."

[Reedy, p. 165]

"There were a few key traits to his personality and it is unlikely that he shed them. As a human being he was a miserable person- a bully, sadist, lout and egoist. He had no sense of loyalty (despite his protestations that it was a quality that he valued above all others) and he enjoyed tormenting those who had done the most for him. He seemed to take a special delight in humiliating those who had cast their lot in with him. It may well be that this was the result of a form of self-loathing in which he concluded that there had to be something wrong with anyone who would associate with him."

[Reedy, p. 171]

"His lapses from civilized conduct were deliberate and usually intended to subordinate someone else to his will. He did disgusting things because he realized other people had to pretend that they did not mind. It was his method of bending them to his designs.

[Reedy, pp. 171-172]

Arthur Schlesinger from his Journals

1952-2000

January 6 1963

The New Year opened quietly, with the President [JFK] still in Florida. On Friday, January 4, I went to the National Archives for the opening of an exhibition celebrating the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation. Bobby gave the speech - it was derived from a speech I had written for the President for use on January 1 by television from Palm Beach, but which the President had decided not to use on the grounds that a segregated city was hardly the best place from which to make an emancipation speech. It was a good speech; and, at the end, Joe Rauh passed me a note saying, "Poor Lyndon." I asked Joe what he meant. He said, "Lyndon must know he is through. Bobby is going to be the next President."

[Schlesinger, Journals, p. 185]

October 13 1963

Frank Wisner and Mac Herter went into a long bit about how terrible it was for Jackie Kennedy to go off on the Onassis yacht. Wisner said that "everyone" in Europe knew that Lee Radziwill was having an affair with Onassis, and that Jackie was along as cover. The gossip of the idle rich is exceedingly boring.

[Schlesinger, Journals, p. 201]

March 25 1964

"There is nothing more dangerous, so far as I can see, than being accepted by Johnson as one of his own. I think he has been meticulously polite to those in the White House whom he regards as Kennedy men. But, when he starts regarding them as Johnson men, their day is over. He begins to treat them as Johnson men, which means like servants. This is what is happening to Pierre Salinger. Of all the Kennedy people, he seemed to make the transition most easily - which meant that LBJ began shouting at him, ordering him around and humiliating him just as if he were Jenkins or Valenti. Teddy White told me a terrible story in which Johnson made Salinger eat a plate of bean soup at a White House luncheon out of pure delight in the exercise of authority. As soon as people become Johnson men, he seems to stop listening to them and to use them only as instruments of his own desires."

[Schlesinger, Journals, p. 225]

"June 16 1964

I went to New York on Tuesday night for a dinner in honor of Jackie to thank contributors to the Library. Afterward we went to the Smiths'. I had a long talk with JBK. She started to tell me about the trip back from Dallas and the effort made to get her to change her dress when Jim Fosburgh came up and we had a change of subject. A few nights ago (June 5) at the French Embassy, Godfrey McHugh gave me a long account of that ghastly afternoon. Godfrey told me that they did not know the Johnsons were on Air Force One. He and Kenny kept asking the pilot to take off, and were told that the plane had to wait for Mrs. Johnson's luggage - a mysterious excuse, since none of them knew that the Johnsons were already occupying the presidential apartments in the back of the plane. Godfrey also said that LBJ was in a panic at the hospital, convinced that there was a conspiracy and that he would be the next to go. Godfrey also gave me a horrendous account of his visit to the LBJ Ranch before the [Ludwig] Erhard visit in December -

Johnson's crudeness, discourtesy, drunkenness, etc."

[Schlesinger, Journals, p. 227-228]

July 23 1964

Bobby seemed philosophical about the vice presidency. His thoughts are still turning to the idea of spending a year at Oxford reading and writing.

We talked a good deal about his relationship to LBJ. Obviously Johnson's actions in the first 24 hours after JFK's death left wounds which will take a long time to heal. Bobby commented that Sarge Shriver had taken it on himself to harmonize the situation then and had only made it worse. Bobby said, "I told Sarge that if I wanted him to intervene I was capable of asking him to do so." His references to Sarge were fairly cool, and he seemed scornful of the notion that Sarge might be a serious possibility for the vice presidency.

After a silence Bobby said, "You know the worst thing Johnson has said? ... Once he told Pierre Salinger, 'When I was young in Texas, I used to know a cross-eyed boy. His eyes were crossed, and so was his character. Sometimes I think that, when you remember the assassination of Trujillo and the assassination of Diem, what happened to Kennedy may have been divine retribution.'"

[Schlesinger, Journals, p. 227-228]

[My note: John Kennedy had a lazy eye and was a bit cross eyed.]

October 30 1966

"[RFK] talked a bit about campaigning with Johnson. He said that, after a day together in New York, he said to Johnson back at the hotel, "Did you enjoy the day?" Johnson looked at him earnestly and said "Of all the things in life, this is what I most enjoy doing." Bobby said it to us incredulously" "Imagine saying that, of all the things in life, this is what you like the most."

At Clark's we talked about the [William] Manchester book [*The Death of a President*], and this led on to a discussion of the autopsy photographs and then of the Warren Report. RFK wondered how long he could continue to avoid comment on the report. It is evident that he believes it was a poor job and will not endorse it, but that he is unwilling to criticize it and thereby reopen the whole tragic business."

[Schlesinger, Journals, p. 254]

December 10 1967

Dick [Goodwin] suggested that LBJ, if reelected, would use all his wiles and powers to prevent RFK's nomination. (Bobby interjected, "He would die and make Hubert President rather than let me get it.") Ted felt that he would try this, but his capacity to do damage would be limited."

[Schlesinger, Journals, p. 268]

March 13 1968

"I went to dinner [Tuesday] at Ham Armstrong's - the Anthony Edens, Jack McCloy, Bill and Judith Moyes, Nin Ryan. I had a fascinating talk with Bill. He thinks that LBJ is now well sealed off from reality; the White House atmosphere, he said, is "impenetrable." He also feels that LBJ explains away all criticism as based on personal or political antagonism; Bill used the word "paranoid." He said that he had himself such a personal debt to Johnson that it had taken him a long time to reach these conclusions, and even longer to say them; but he felt that four more years of Johnson would be ruinous for the country."

[Schlesinger, Journals, p. 280]

April 4 1968

David Karr called today. He had spent an hour yesterday with LBJ and says that it was "terrifying." Johnson was, first of all, filled with self-pity. He seemed very hurt over the Kennedy attitude toward him and kept talking about his "partnership" with JFK. "Then my partner died, and I took over the partnership. I kept on the eleven cowhands [the cabinet]. Some of the tenderfeet [Arthur Schlesinger, Jr?] left me. But I kept on. If he is up there in heaven looking down, I know that he knows what I have done."

He was bitter about RFK. He said for example, "On civil rights I was stronger than he was," instancing some issue about the guarantee of home mortgage loans, which, he said, Bobby would not put into the civil rights bill; ... He also talked about Bobby in connection with the Bay of Pigs (with which Bobby had no connection) and said that the credibility gap began then in the Kennedy administration and not in the Johnson administration. And he kept talking about an alleged affair RFK had with Candy Bergen in Paris.

[Schlesinger, Journals, p. 286-287]

January 14 1969

I took part with Bill Moyers, Jack Valenti, Eric Goldman and Ted Sorensen (in Kansas City) in a National Education Television commentary. Afterward Bill and I went over to the Algonquin for a drink. We talked a bit about the problem of writing about Johnson. Bill said, as he has said to me before (and Dick Goodwin has said even more often), that one great trouble was that no one would believe it. He said that he could not see how one could write about Johnson the private monster and Johnson the public statesman and construct a credible narrative. "He is a sick man," Bill said. At one point he and Dick Goodwin became so concerned that they decided to read up on mental illness - Dick read up on paranoia and Bill on the manic-depressive cycle."

[Schlesinger, Journals, p. 306]

January 15 1971

Last night I spoke at the annual dinner of the Century. I sat next to Mac Bundy and we discussed, among other things, the Khrushchev memoirs. I remarked on the curious resemblance between Khrushchev's account of the life around Stalin - the domineering and obsessive dictator, the total boredom of the social occasions revolving around him, the horror when invited to attend and the even greater horror when not invited - and Albert Speer's account of the life around Hitler. Mac said, "When I read Khrushchev, I was reminded of something else in addition - my last days in the White House with LBJ."

[Schlesinger, Journals, p. 333]